

Problem: Budworm, Geranium (*Helicoverpa virescens*)



Hosts: Petunia, Geranium, Roses, Tobacco, others

Description: The larva of this insect damages the buds by boring into them before they open. The caterpillars feed on the flowers for about a month and then drop to the soil to pupate. There are normally two generations per year, with the second causing the most harm. The striped caterpillars vary widely in color with green, red, light brown and dark forms possible. The color of the larva is related to the color of the flowers on which they feed. The adult of this insect is a moth.

Damaged buds often fail to open. Those that do will show evidence of feeding on the petals. Damage normally peaks in late summer because of increased numbers from the second generation.

Recommendations: Control of the budworm is difficult. Handpicking at dusk can be effective on small plantings. For larger plantings, chemical control may be the only practical option. Look for products with synthetic pyrethroid active ingredients such as permethrin (numerous trade names), esfenvalerate (Asana, Bug Buster II), cyfluthrin (Bayer Vegetable & Garden Insect Spray), bifenthrin (Hi-Yield Bug Blaster Bifenthrin) or gamma-cyhalothrin (Spectracide Triazicide). Products with spinosad (Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew, Monterey Garden Insect Spray) should also be effective.

Severe winters can be a natural form of control from one year to the next. Temperatures below 20 degrees F are hard enough to kill overwintering pupa. Because pupal cases are usually 2 to 6 inches deep, most exposed areas in Kansas will provide good control during a cold winter. However, microclimates next to heated buildings may allow survival.

References:

1. [Tobacco \(Geranium\) Budworm](#), Fact Sheet No. 5.581, Colorado State University

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